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ABSTRACT

The views of 65 university presidents about athletic programs, the administration of their athletic programs, and the impact of problems of athletic program on university leadership were studied in spring 1985. Ten of the presidents responding to the survey were from private institutions, while 55 were from public universities. On the average, they had eight men's and seven women's sports programs; all of the institutions belonged to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I-A. Case studies were also undertaken with four universities under NCAA sanction and four institutions with acknowledged success in blending excellence in both athletics and academics. Lack of internal control (including confused and fractured lines of responsibility) was found to be a critical factor contributing to problems in school athletic programs. Additional findings include: (1) some presidents do not have board backing for "taking charge;" (2) presidents, on the average, are planning to do something besides being president within five years or less; (3) presidents see money pressure to win, and over-zealous supporters, including alumni, as the key factors in athletic problems; and yet (4) presidents see alumni and corporate support growing in importance in the future if academic quality is to improve. (SW)

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Administration of University Athletic Programs: Internal Control and Excellence

An Executive Summary

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Administration of University Athletic Programs: Internal Control and Excellence

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An Executive Summary

A study of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I-A universities found that lack of internal control (including confused and fractured lines of responsibility) is a critical factor contributing to problems in university athletic programs.

In addition, the study revealed that: (1) some presidents do not have board backing for "taking charge"; (2) presidents, on the average, are planning to do something besides being president within five years or less; (3) presidents see money, pressure to win, and over-zealous supporters, including alumni, as the key factors in athletic problems; and yet (4) presidents see alumni and corporate support growing in importance in the years ahead if the academic quality of their institutions is to improve.

These findings were based on comprehensive responses of 65 university presidents to a survey in the summer of 1985. In addition, eight case studies were completed—four of institutions under NCAA sanctions and four of institutions with acknowledged success in blending excellence in athletics with excellence in academics.

There is a clear consensus among the presidents as to which universities in America have successfully blended excellence in athletics with well-established excellence in academics. Those institutions are Stanford University, the University of Michigan, Notre Dame University, Duke University, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Pennsylvania State University, and the University of Virginia. While the survey focused exclusively on Division I-A institutions, many presidents in responding commented that, in the words of one, "Many Division I-AA institutions are very successful at this."

The survey also revealed the following additional perceptions regarding university athletic programs.

- Ninety-two percent of the presidents believe that there are major problems in athletic programs across the nation.
- Only one-third are fearful of problems at their institutions.
- Twenty-two percent acknowledge having serious problems at their universities.
- Athletic problems only rank fourth among critical issues currently facing these presidents, with funding, internal governance, and external governance ranking higher.
- Most believe that problems in athletic programs will fade in importance within five years, with funding, enrollments, academic quality, change, faculty issues, and public support ranking higher.
- There are significant differences between the ways exemplary institutions and other universities organize and control their athletic programs.
- The presidents perceive a lessening of pressure to expand women's athletics but expect to see problems similar to those in men's programs develop in women's programs.

The Study

This project was undertaken in spring 1985 in an effort to gain insight into the thinking of university presidents about athletic programs, the administration of their athletic programs, and the impact of problems of athletic programs on university leadership. One hundred thirty-eight NCAA Division I-A university presidents were surveyed during summer 1985. Seventy-five responded to the survey, with 65 providing usable responses.

Fifty-five of the responding universities are public, while the other ten are private. Student enrollments range from 5,000 to 56,000, with the median enrollment being 16,400. On the average, they have eight men's and seven women's sports programs.

The study included additional research on two groups of institutions. An associate, Dr. Eleanor Gerber, concurrently developed four case studies of universities having major athletics problems: the University of Florida, Tulane University, Clemson University and Southern Methodist University. After identification of the seven exemplary institutions via the survey responses, mini case studies were completed on four—Michigan, Notre Dame, Pennsylvania State, and Virginia. The information provided in these eight case studies served to support or refute findings from the survey.

The Findings of Internal Control as a Problem

The primary finding of internal control problems and a disjointed administrative structure came from two sources: the survey of presidents and the case studies.

In the survey, presidents were asked to assign a level of responsibility—one for low and five for high—of certain persons and groups (president, academic vice president, other vice presidents, athletic director, etc.) in the control of areas such as budget, academics for athletes, appointment of coaches, audits, and student financial assistance for athletes. The results are shown in the Figure 1 matrix.

Figure 1 - Athletic Control Matrix for All Institutions

	Budget	Academics	Appointment of Coaches	Auditing	Student Aid	Total
President	[illegible]	169	200	208	154	966
Academic Vice President	[illegible]	197	99	89	109	602
Other Vice President	[illegible]	80	106	156	127	621
Athletic Director	[illegible]	191	249	198	225	1098
Coaches	[illegible]	171	94	89	167	630
TOTAL	[illegible]	808	748	740	782	3967

Analysis of the survey results reveals the following:

1. The athletic director is the central and most powerful figure on campus in regard to all aspects of the program of student athletics. The president is clearly second in power.
2. It appears that the president, vice presidents, board, and athletic director share responsibility for the athletic budget in a major way.
3. Although the budget is the key financial administrative interest at most institutions, student athlete financial assistance is firmly in the control of coaches and the athletic director.
4. The NCAA is seen as a key player in the student financial assistance area, but as having no significant role in budget, academics, audits, or the appointment of coaches.
5. Alumni, boosters, and athletic conferences are not seen as major actors in controlling athletic programs.

To contrast these general findings for the 65 institutions, we analyzed the responses of four institutions identified as exemplary. Michigan, Notre Dame, Penn State, and Virginia. The findings are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2 - Athletic Control Matrix for Four Exemplary Institutions

	Budget	Academics	Appointment of Coaches	Auditing	Student Aid	Total
President	20	20	16	20	17	95
Academic Vice President	19	13	10	10	9	61
Other Vice President	20	17	18	19	19	93
Athletic Director	18	17	18	15	14	82
TOTALS	77	67	62	64	59	331

In contrast with the larger sample of 65, following are the results for these institutions.

- The president emerges as the most powerful figure, followed by a vice president other than academic vice president. The athletic director rated third. The administrative or executive vice president is an important figure. The athletic director is a leading administrator (in terms of control) only in the appointment of coaches.
- The top administrators of exemplary institutions see themselves more in control (or more responsible for) academics and student financial assistance than is the case in the larger group, with less of a role for the NCAA.

Comparative statistical analysis of the four exemplary institutions with responses from the 65 gave an indication that the locus of internal control may be crucial. Further information from the survey and the case studies provides strong supporting evidence. The following is a summary of our findings.

- Of the 68 percent of presidents indicating no fear of problems in their athletic programs, an overwhelming majority (96%) gave strong internal control as the reason for their confidence.
- In all of the four case studies of institutions under NCAA sanctions, there was clear evidence of lack of administrative control and even confusion as to the actual chain of command. In one case, the athletic director did not appear on the university's primary administrative organizational chart; although the personnel director and the computer czar did. At another university, the athletic director/football coach technically reports to a vice president for operations and the athletic budget is under control of a financial vice president; yet athletic policy is made by an athletic council, while the athletic director/coach is actually employed and paid by a quasi-university organization on which the operations vice president is just one member of the board.
- In another well known university, the president did not have the authority to hire, fire, or reassign the athletic director. After four major clashes with the NCAA over more than a decade, this president took a recommendation to his board of trustees to reassign the athletic director and ended up being "reassigned" himself.
- In the 65-university survey, 70 percent of the presidents expressed confidence that "university presidents can resolve the athletic dilemma" by simply taking control. The other 30 percent felt that control could best be exerted through their conference of the NCAA.
- Comparative analysis of the two matrices revealed that the larger sample of 65 universities rely far more heavily on the NCAA in the academic program and student financial assistance areas than do the exemplary institutions. In fact, the presidents of the four exemplary institutions responding to the survey wrote in the following statement: "We just make sure that we follow the NCAA rules."
- The presidents list poor administrative control (20%) second, just behind competitive pressure (23%), and ahead of academics (12%), as a key problem in athletic programs.

The Presidents

The survey was designed to elicit information that would provide insight into the outlook of the university presidents surveyed and to determine whether actual or perceived problems with athletic programs are affecting either their outlook or perceived ability to lead. Results include the following information.

- The 65 presidents have a median tenure in office of five years. (The range is one year to 33 years.) The median expectation of additional tenure is five years. Cross checking of the data revealed that the 22 percent of presidents acknowledging athletic problems in their universities as well as the 30 percent fearful of problems had about the same outlook regarding tenure expectations as the larger group of 65.
- However, when asked about their future career plans, only 22 percent expect to stay in higher education as an administrator or faculty member. Other expectations included retirement (27%), a position in business or government (30%), or "something different." Again, there was no differentiation between those with problems in their athletic programs and the larger group.
- The presidents gave the following responses to the question, "What are the most critical issues I presently deal with on a regular basis?"

Funding	34%
Internal Governance	21%
External Governance	14%
Athletics	8%
Enrollments	5%
Others	18%

- When asked about their expectations of critical issues in five years, the presidents gave the following responses.

Funding	33%
Enrollments	16%
Academic Quality	17%
Change	10%
Faculty Issues	8%
Public Support	7%
Athletics	6%
Others	9%

- In response to a question about future sources of university funding, the presidents indicated an expectation of about the same from state government (60%), less from the federal government (60%), more from alumni (73%), and more from business and industry (83%).

- The presidents thought that it is more important for presidents to possess a strategic vision for the university and forge a good working relationship with the board and faculty than to encourage individual initiative, provide educational leadership. or present good ideas.
- Fifty-nine percent of the 65 presidents see continued pressure to support women's athletic programs as coming from the president or university policy rather than from external sources (15%). They do expect that women's athletic programs will continue to develop some of the same problems as now haunt the men's programs.
- The presidents see money, overzealous supporters and alumni pressures as contributing significantly to current athletic problems. Organized crime and drugs are not seen as important.

Case Studies

The case studies of four universities under some form of NCAA sanction or investigation revealed a pattern of serious problems. A brief summary of those generic problems follows.

Lack of administrative control is evident in:

- unclear lines of responsibility and authority;
- distant or laissez-faire approach by presidents until problems appear in the press and the faculty demands attention; and
- athletic departments separate from the rest of the university and operating in an autonomous or semi-autonomous manner.

This situation permits fiscal, academic, and ethical abuses to occur easily, stay hidden, and spread quietly.

It is clear that the pressure to win is being intensified as revenues fall in the wake of the breaking of the NCAA monopoly on television rights. Many athletic programs have large capital debts which, coupled with falling revenues, make universities more susceptible to pressure from large donors. In most institutions, these large donors loom very large in the eye of university presidents. The lack of control of boosters has caused more problems for these universities than academics or any other aspect of athletics.

Faculty-athletic program relations are a problem in many universities. On one hand, powerful athletic directors bully and pressure academic departments while, on the other, faculties are at times hostile to athletics, often because they are misinformed.

Substantially different standards for admission of student athletes result in low graduation rates and charges of exploitation. Athletes tend to have at least as good counseling and academic support services as other students but substantially beefed-up assistance for student athletes is being widely endorsed.

There is a tendency at universities with problems to use the NCAA as a whipping boy. This tactic deflects attention away from inadequate internal administration and control. At the same time, there is substantial interest on the part of many presidents in strengthening the hand of the NCAA through new and different rules and stronger enforcement efforts.

A cursory review of these situations quickly brings us to the realization that the root cause of the problem in university athletic programs is the lack of strong internal control and administration. This includes out-of-control boosters who are tolerated by university administrations.

Systemic Problems and Proposed Solutions

There is a broad range of athletic problems being experienced by many (if not most) universities. They include competitive pressure, improper recruiting practices, the paying of prospective student athletes to sign with particular schools, drugs and organized crime involvement, falsifying records, low graduation rates, charges of exploitation, and difficulties in administering programs. The knowledge of these problems and others is so widespread as to obviate the necessity for any discussion here except for one point—the problems may be endemic to the system.

One of the first recorded intercollegiate athletic events in the mid-1800s was beset with problems familiar to colleges and universities today—money and ineligible participants. This event was the first regatta between Harvard and Yale, which was sponsored by the Elkins Railroad line and was used to promote the railroad. The boating race kicked off intercollegiate athletics with commercialization, spectators, prize money and eligibility questions. The eligibility question arose when Harvard, which won the race, used a Harvard alumnus as their coxswain.

These problems and others have been endemic to intercollegiate athletics for over 100 years. At times, such as 1905 when 18 football players were killed and another 100 severely injured, the problems result in national attention. Only then are solutions, such as forming the NCAA, sought.

Now the universities are once again seeking solutions. In reviewing published accounts of proposed solutions to athletic problems, we discovered several interesting possibilities being discussed in academic circles, including the following.

Substantial attention is being focused on actions at the NCAA level, with the two most prominent being (1) raising academic standards for freshman eligibility in an effort to resolve the problem of poor graduation rates and other academic issues at a system level; and (2) stronger enforcement efforts and harsher penalties for violators of NCAA rules.

Some athletic directors, coaches, and economists are discussing openly paying student athletes. These proposals range from paying each athlete $100 per month to negotiating with each recruit on an individual-worth basis. The first case raises the problem of spending money for the many student athletes who are economically disadvantaged, and the second indicates that colleges and universities are economically exploiting the most gifted athletes.

Two other solutions focus on academics and finances. An unusual solution to the academic problems of student athletes was proposed by a faculty member and a student athlete at Syracuse University in the September 25, 1985 issue of the *Chronical of Higher Education*. They advocate the establishment of vocational/technical institutes as university subsidiaries so that a student incapable of competing in an academic environment will have a means of earning a living as a welder or auto mechanic if the student does not make the grade as a professional athlete.

A solution to university financial problems as well as athlete academic questions currently being discussed by some is to externalize the problem by creating a professional sports sponsored farm club/minor league system for the revenue sports. These farm clubs could be loosely affiliated with universities, with some athletes actually being students.

While the possibilities for these solutions vary widely, none really focuses on the central problem revealed by this study, that of internal control.

Conclusions

It is obvious to any observer of higher education and sports in this country that intercollegiate athletics at the highest competitive level, NCAA Division I-A, are in deep trouble. This view is reinforced by the results of this study. However, the study reveals that the key to this problem is not simply with the stricter enforcement of more complex NCAA rules. *It is clear that strong presidential leadership, clear lines of authority and responsibility, and tighter internal university control are required.*

The question is: will the presidents be able, in the words of one long-term and distinguished president, to "take charge"? Perhaps it is too much to ask presidents to take courageous (some might say foolhardy) stands to enable their institutions to take charge of their own destinies. Perhaps that is why the NCAA with complex rules and harsher sanctions looks so good to many presidents.

On the other hand, perhaps presidents can ill afford not to take charge. In the words of legendary University of North Carolina President William Friday, "It is clear that presidents must act, must lead, must show courage unless they want national disapproval!"

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